

Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center is one of the largest therapeutic riding centers in the United States and has served the greater Seattle region for over 47 years. Located on 14 acres in Redmond, Washington, Little Bit offers Therapy (physical, occupational, and speech-language therapy), Adaptive Riding (recreational), summer camp, mental health, and educational services to both children and adults with disabilities.

Little Bit's Therapy program typically serves between 125 and 140 unduplicated patients each year. Over 90 percent of Little Bit's Therapy patients are under the age of 18, with patients as young as age two. Little Bit employs nine licensed therapists, including three physical therapists (PTs) and one physical therapy assistant (PTA). Little Bit hopes to expand its therapy team with another physical therapist to serve more patients.

Hippotherapy is a term that comes from the Greek base "hippo" meaning "horse." The term refers to how occupational, physical, and speech-language pathologists utilize the equine's purposeful movement to address functional therapy goals by engaging patients' sensory, neuromotor, and cognitive systems. The horse's movement can be manipulated to address the patient's challenges, such as deficits in balance, strength, endurance, coordination, communication, and attention. Thus, therapy does not teach riding skills; rather the goals are geared towards promoting independence with activities of daily living and increased participation in family, school, and community life. A typical therapy session takes place on the back of the horse, in our on-site treatment rooms, and in the natural environment of the barn.

The movement of the horse creates a multi-sensory experience that is controlled by a skilled horse handler under the direction of the therapist. The three-dimensional movement imparted to the patient from the horse's movement provides neuromotor inputs to the patient. In a typical 30-minute session, the horse will take 1,500 to 2,500 steps, providing high repetitions of inputs to facilitate the neuromotor system to support function. In addition, the horse's rhythmic movement and patient's position on the horse can be changed, to provide specific and regulating inputs to balance, hearing, visual, skin, and joint sensory receptors. As a result, the patient can make improvements with balance, strength, coordination, and postural control. Once regulated, patients are able to interact with their environment and have improved shared attention. Improvements in all these areas can result in increased independence with activities such as walking, activities of daily life, communication, and appropriate play.

Little Bit has featured two success stories of Physical Therapy patients that utilized equine movement in their sessions over the past few years. Check them out at the following links:

- Bronson's video, found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mzrpcRik7ZM>, illustrates both the effectiveness of physical therapy for children with disabilities as well as the power of the connectiveness and support found within the Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center community.
- AnnDee's video, found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FM3GEnDePKY>, illustrates the effectiveness of physical therapy for adults with disabilities and how therapy treatments can also support a patient's recreational Adaptive Riding experience.

The American Hippotherapy Association (AHA) is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization that provides educational resources to therapists who incorporate equines into their treatments. Little Bit has paired with the American Hippotherapy Association (AHA) to educate therapists on how to incorporate equines, equine movement, and the equine environment into their treatments through continuing education courses. The AHA offers both online and in-person education to therapists throughout the

year to develop a foundation for partnering with equines in their treatments. Little Bit hosts one or two courses a year on-site; this year they will be hosting a Level 2 course in September.

Learn more about Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center's Therapy program at [www.littlebit.org](http://www.littlebit.org) or by contacting Little Bit's Therapy Services Director Kelsie McGladrey at [kmcgladrey@littlebit.org](mailto:kmcgladrey@littlebit.org).